

An address to the public [on premature death and interment] / [William Hawes].

Contributors

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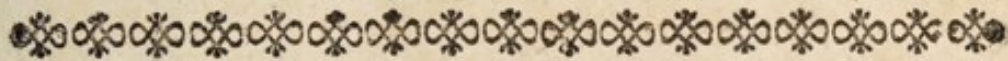
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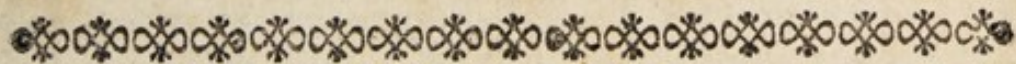
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A N

A D D R E S S , &c.

AS the following address relates to a subject in which every individual is interested, the writer wishes to render the knowledge of it as general as possible, and for that reason has thought proper to publish it.

The custom of laying out the bodies of the persons supposed to be dead, as soon as respiration ceases, and the interment of them before the signs of putrefaction appear, has been frequently opposed by men of learning and humanity in this and other countries. *Monf. Bruhier*, in particular, a physician of great eminence in Paris, published a piece, about thirty years ago, intitled, "The Uncertainty of the Signs of Death;" in which he clearly proved, from the testimonies of various authors, and the attestations of unexceptionable witnesses, that many persons who have been buried alive, and were providentially discovered in that state, had been rescued from the grave, and enjoyed the pleasures of society for several years after.

But notwithstanding the numerous and well-authenticated facts of this kind, the custom above-mentioned remains in full force. As soon

been prematurely numbered among the dead; and that the fond parent, by neglecting the means of recalling life, has often been the guiltless executioner of her own offspring.

To prevent the commission of such dreadful mistakes, no child, whose life has been apparently extinguished by convulsions, should be *consigned* to the grave, till the means of recovery, above-recommended in apoplexies, &c. have been tried; and, if possible, under the direction of some skilful practitioner of medicine, who may vary them as circumstances shall require.

When fevers arise in weak habits, or when the cure of them has been principally attempted by means of depletion, the consequent debility is often very great, and the patient sometimes sinks into a state which bears so close an affinity to that of death, that, I am afraid, it has too often deceived the by-standers, and induced them to send for the undertaker, when they should have had recourse to the succours of medicine.

In such cases, Volatiles, *Eau de luce*, for example, should be applied to the nose, rubbed on the temples, and sprinkled often about the bed; hot flannels, moistened with a strong solution of camphorated spirit, may likewise be applied over the breast, and renewed every quarter of an hour; and as soon as the patient is able to swallow, a tea-spoonful of the strongest cordial should be given every five minutes.

without intermission, three quarters of an hour; at the end of which time she began to breathe. The friction was then increased; two or three deep inspirations followed, and in a short time the child, who was supposed to be dead by the physician, as well as the by-standers, was, to the surprise of both, and the great joy of her parents, restored to life and health.

The same methods may also be used with propriety in the small pox, when the pustules sink, and death apparently ensues; and likewise in any other acute diseases, when the vital functions are suspended from a similar cause.

Even in old age, when life seems to have been gradually drawing to a close, the *appearances of death* are often fallacious.

“ Not many years since, a lady in Cornwall, more than eighty years of age, who had been a considerable time declining, took to her bed, and, in a few days, seemingly expired in the morning. As she had often desired not to be buried till she had been two days dead, her request was to have been regularly complied with by her relations. All that saw her looked upon her as dead, and the report was current through the whole place; nay, a gentleman of the town actually wrote to his friend in the island of Scilly, that she was deceased. But one of those who were paying the last kind office of humanity to her remains, perceived some warmth about the middle of the back, and acquainting her friends with it, they applied a mirror to her mouth; but after repeated trials, could not observe it in the least gained; her under jaw was likewise fallen, as the common phrase is, and, in short, she had every appearance of a dead person. All this time she had not been stripped or dressed, but the windows were opened, as is usual in the chambers of the deceased. In the evening the heat seemed to increase, and at length she was perceived to breathe.”

See Lond. Chron. vol. 4, p. 465.

It was the intention of the writer to publish a work upon this subject, but as his various avocations

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tions will not permit him to carry that design into execution, he thought it his duty to throw out the above hints; and if they should be the means of preventing one person from being laid out; or, what is more horrible, buried alive, it will afford the writer a pleasure of the noblest kind, that arising from the consciousness of doing good to his fellow-creatures.

W. HAWES.

Passgrave Place, Sept. 5.

P. S. If that regard be paid to the above address which the subject of it seems to demand, and any life or lives be saved in consequence of the hints that I have thrown out, the communication of any such instances of success will be esteemed a particular favour; as it will afford me the most solid pleasure, and be a satisfactory evidence that a man, who labours to promote the interests of humanity, will be attended to by the public.

To the P U B L I C,

In Reply to the Address signed

W. H A W E S.

OPINIONS founded in *error*, where they have a tendency to affect the public welfare, cannot be too early refuted. The subsequent cursory remarks are left to be enlarged on by those whose abilities and situation are more favourable for such discussion.

The general address relative to the *protraction* recommended in burying the dead, is by far of a more alarming nature than any thing that has hitherto transpired, respecting our martial operations on the other side of the Atlantic. Dreadful might be the result, should such advice be universally adhered to. Disease has ever proved more fatal than the weapons of art; and the adoption of the sentiments alluded to, would be to produce a general pestilence.

The author insinuates, that the dead should not be interred, or rather, that they should not even be *prepared* for that intention, till signs of external *putrefaction* appear, which often may not happen till several days after the internal corruption of the viscera. The impropriety of such insinuation must be obvious to every one who considers the obnoxious influence of respired air impregnated with the contaminating effluvia of mortified bodies. Whether the extended atmosphere became generally infected, or such infection was confined to the respective dwellings where the dead were suffered to corrupt, those malignant maladies could scarcely fail to supervene, which would in time become universally contagious.

This has been often experienced in military campaigns, while the putrid exhalations of corpses not speedily buried, have generated that epidemical indisposition, which has proved more destructive than all the other devastations of war. If then the health of the living so essentially depends on the *purity of the element we breathe*, and without which we cannot exist, it is manifestly evident, that a compliance with the proposition before-mentioned, would be attended with consequences diametrically opposite to its expressed intention, if a proposal may be deemed insalutary, which, with an *uncertain* view of prolonging the life of a *single* individual, would have a *certain* tendency to endanger the lives of *thousands*. That the apprehensions of^l the addresser may not be altogether without foundation, is not denied; but it is by no means warrantable or judicious to attempt to remove a *lesser* evil, at the expence of a *greater*. That gentleman will therefore excuse the writer, for adding, in opposition to his own anticipated satisfaction from the reverse, that he will think himself happy, should the preceding animadversions be found to have contributed to render his proposed innovation abortive, notwithstanding the writer's equal disinclination to be buried *durante vita*.

With respect to the customary offices that succeed the apparent discontinuance of respiration, it would certainly be right not to expose the body to the external air for a few hours after, or till the several parts are cold enough to produce that rigidity, which, though not always, is *generally* a certain indication of the vital extinction, or, at least, not to be *over hasty* in the ceremonies of such a department. It would also be prudent for the friends and relations of the deceased, to refrain

frain from the unavailable custom with many of taking their farewell of the dead by a labial salutation before the coffin is closed; nor should any one be longer or oftener in the apartment where the corpse is laid, after there has been time for the fluids and abdominal viscera to corrupt, than there is occasion for.

The strictures on *Godfrey's Cordial*, with which Mr. Hawes concludes his Address, are obviously pertinent, and merit the most serious attention, not only of the public in general, but of the legislature in particular, with respect to the interdiction of the sale of a medicine, which must often not only prove mortally deleterious, but *enfeeble* the constitution of those children who survive its pernicious influence, from whence proceed the diseases of maturer age, and the generation of weakly progenies. This is certainly a public grievance, that cannot be too early redressed, and in which the greatest vigilance may not prove sufficient to prevent the first families in the kingdom from being domestically interested.

W. RENWICK.

Berwick upon Tweed,
Sept. 12, 1777.

To Mr. R E N W I C K,
Of BERWICK upon TWEED.

S I R,

AS you have, in a very liberal and gentleman-like manner, proposed an objection to *one* of the cautions contained in my address, concerning the dangerous custom of laying out persons as soon as *apparently* dead, or, in other words, as soon as respiration ceases; I think it a duty I

owe both to you and the public, to state my reasons for thinking that objection of no force.

I am happy to find that you perfectly agree with me in my leading principle, the impropriety of laying out persons immediately upon the appearance of death. "With respect to the customary offices that succeed the apparent discontinuance of respiration, it would certainly be right, you observe, not to expose the body to the external air for a few hours after, or till the several parts are cold enough to produce that rigidity, which, though not always, is generally a certain indication of the vital extinction, or at least not to be *over hasty* in the ceremonies of such a department."

These, Sir, are your own words, and I have read them with pleasure, because they confirm the *propriety* of my principal caution, and will, I hope, efficaciously co-operate with it in abolishing the *inhuman* custom above-mentioned.

Your objection to my other caution, respecting the *interment* of bodies, seems, in a great measure, to be founded on the misconception of my meaning. "The author of the address, you say, insinuates, that the dead should not be interred, or rather, that they should not be *prepared* for that intention, till signs of external putrefaction appear." Permit me, Sir, to cite the passages which more immediately relate to interment, and you will perceive, upon reading them again, that I have not thrown out the insinuation which you have *hastily* imputed to me. The passages are these. "The custom of *laying* out the bodies of persons supposed to be dead, as soon as respiration ceases, and the interment of them before the signs of putrefaction appear, has been frequently opposed by men of learning and humanity

nity in this and other countries. Mons. Bruhier, in particular, a physician of great eminence in Paris, published a piece about thirty years ago, entitled, "the Uncertainty of the Signs of Death;" in which he clearly proved, from the testimonies of various authors, and the attestations of unexceptionable witnesses, that many persons who had been buried alive, and were providentially discovered in that state, had been rescued from the grave, and enjoyed the pleasures of society for several years after."

"But notwithstanding the numerous and well-authenticated facts of this kind, the custom above-mentioned remains in full force. As soon as the *semblance* of death appears, the chamber of the sick is deserted by friends, relatives, and physicians, and the *apparently dead*, though frequently a living body, is committed to the management of an ignorant and unfeeling nurse, whose care extends no farther than laying the limbs straight, and securing her accustomed spoil. The bed-cloaths are immediately removed, and the body is exposed to the air, which, when cold, mult *extinguish* the little spark of life that may remain, and which by a different method might have been kindled into flame."

But admitting I had insinuated, that the dead should not be *prepared* for interment till signs of external putrefaction appear, I think that even then your *dreadful apprehensions* would have been entirely groundless. The signs of putrefaction, in the first stage of that process, and which are decisive indications of death, are not accompanied with fœtor, and consequently no mischief from your own principle, can possibly arise in waiting for their appearance. In the second stage, indeed, a fœtid and injurious vapour
arises;

arises ; but unless the mass of putrefying matter be very considerable, as has sometimes been the case after battles, &c. when the slain have been left unburied, that vapour is in a very short time combined with the air, and entirely disarmed of its danger.* If this were not the case, the air of London, from the quantity of animal and vegetable matter continually putrefying in the streets, &c. would very soon become intolerably offensive, and altogether unfit for the purposes of respiration.

But “ the signs of *external* putrefaction, you say, may not happen till several days after the *internal* corruption of the viscera.” Be it so, Sir, it furnishes no objection to the rule I have recommended; for if the abdominal viscera corrupt, and no putrid vapour escapes, the air cannot be “ impregnated with contaminating effluvia.” If putrid vapour should escape in any considerable quantity, it is a *sign* that putrefaction has taken place, and that the body may safely be interred. In general, however, a putrid discolouration of some parts of the body, particularly of the abdomen, precedes the exhalation of any noxious vapour, as is well known to those who are conversant in dissections. But the time which may elapse before this discoloration appears, is very uncertain, as it depends on the nature of the disease which terminated life, the heat of the weather, and various other causes.

To conclude, I wish it were deeply impressed upon the mind of every individual, that the only *unequivocal* signs of death, are the marks of pu-

* For the law which obtains in the chemical combination of air and variolous vapour, and which is the same, I presume, as that which obtains in the combination of air and putrid vapour, see Dr. Watkinson’s “ Examination of a Charge brought against Inoculation” &c.

trefaction†, and that those who are committed to the earth before these marks are discovered, may possibly be buried alive. But I wish it were still deeper impressed, that the danger of being buried alive, though the fact has frequently happened, is not so great as that of being *laid out* as dead, whilst living, and having the vital spark *extinguished* by a precipitate exposure to cold air. I cannot, therefore, omit this opportunity of again exhorting those whom it may concern, not to consider the persons who apparently die of apoplectic and other fits, and especially *young children* who are carried off by convulsions, as irrecoverably lost, till the proper means of restoration have been tried.

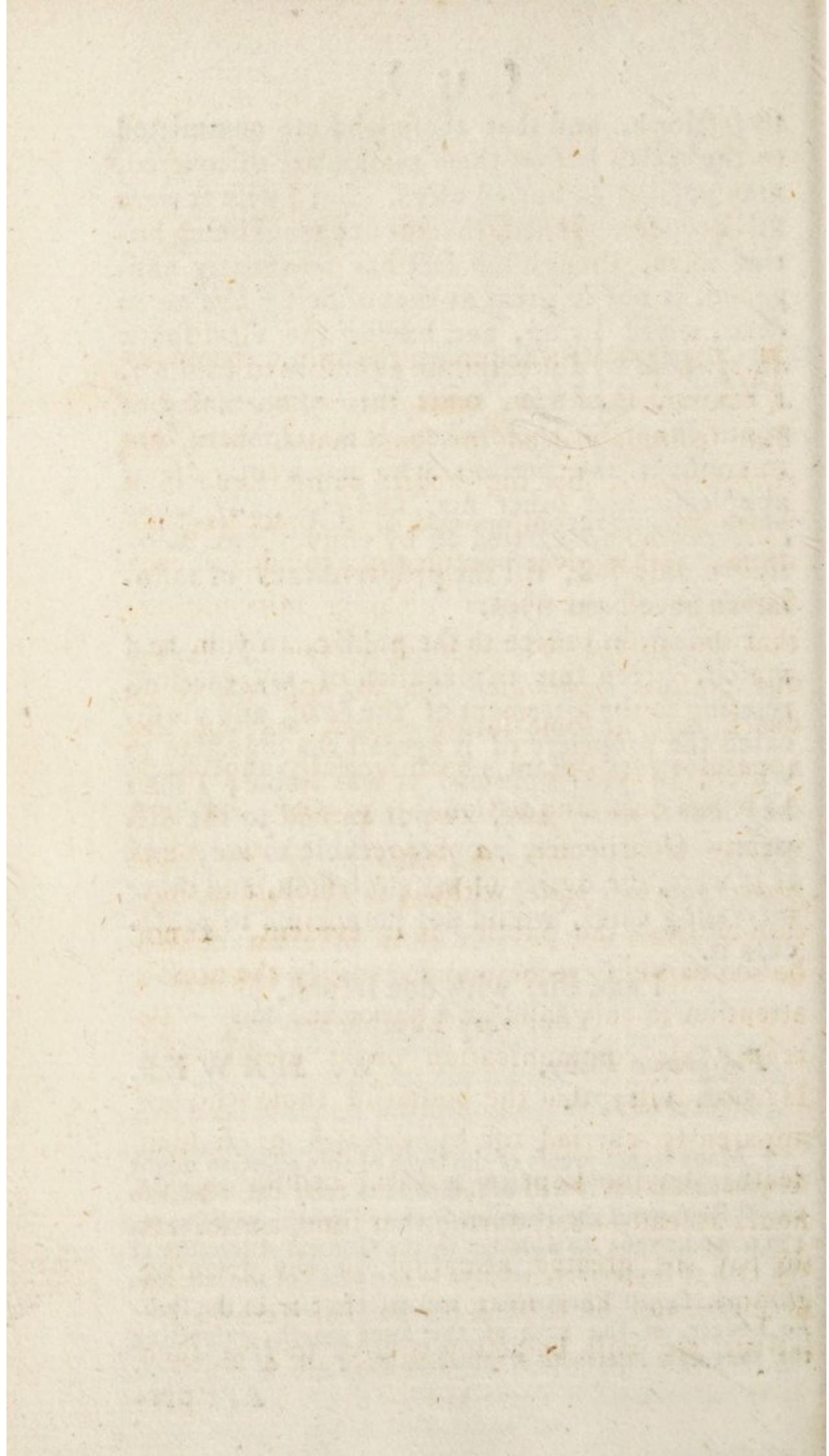
Having, in justice to the public, to you, and myself, given this explanation of my caution, relating to the interment of the dead, and vindicated the propriety of it against the objection to which, in your opinion, it was liable; I shall beg leave, *on my part*, to put an end to the dispute.—Controversy is not agreeable to me; and if it were, the duties of my profession, and other increasing cares, would not permit me to prosecute it.

I am, Sir, with due respect,
Your very humble servant,

Palsgrave Place,
Oct. 1, 1778.

W. HAWES.

† Many recent proofs of the truth of this assertion might be produced; but it will be sufficient to refer the reader to the "Reports of the Humane Society" for the years 1774, 1775, and 1776; to a letter in the General Advertiser of the 11th of September, relative to the death of the late Mr. Holland, signed Theatricus; and also to one in the Public Ledger, of the 10th of the same month, respecting the *premature* interment of the late Dr. Pull, of Leicester.



A P P E N D I X.

MR. HAWES acquaints the public, that in the course of a few ~~years~~ *five persons*, who had been seemingly dead for some hours, *have been restored to life*, by the bodies being kept in a warm bed, as recommended in the preceding address; and it gives him pleasure to add, in consequence of the above pleasing information, that the absurd and inhuman custom of laying out persons *immediately* on the appearance of death, will at some future period, (and that, he hopes not very distant,) be universally abolished. As it has been unquestionably proved, that in a variety of diseases, *a suspension of the vital powers may take place*, without an absolute extinction of life—the public, as is evident, cannot be too earnestly recommended to pay the utmost attention to this solid and important fact. To render his communication of it useful, Mr. Hawes advises, that the bodies of those who are apparently carried off by diseases or sudden death, may be kept in a warm bed for *twelve* hours at least—that, during that time, nurses &c. do pay the greatest attention to the seeming corpses—and he is of opinion, that friends, relatives, &c. will be acting wisely, to give such

persons *half a Guinea*, in the room of death-bed perquisites,* for their extraordinary care, &c.

THE AUTHOR likewise promises to pay the reward of ONE GUINEA to nurses or other attendants, on any child or grown person, returning to life by their humane attention, provided the fact is ascertained by a *gentleman of the faculty*, or attested by *three* creditable persons; † and in hopes of exciting an universal attention to a subject of so much importance to mankind.

Mr. HAWES has within a few months distributed, at a very considerable expence, *three thousand* of his addresses, and continues to give them to gentlemen, ladies, and others who apply. ‡

* In genteel families &c.—it is a melancholy truth, that nurses lay out the body as expeditiously as possible; the many valuable things about the bed, being much more important to such brutes, than the chance of returning life.

† People of fortune should call in the opinion of a Medical man, who has paid attention to this subject, that, by experiments it may be ascertained, whether there are any remains of life. This would entirely remove the *horrid apprehensions* entertained by many of being buried alive.

‡ If any life or lives be saved through an attention to this address, the communication of such happy events, will be esteemed a particular favour, as every new instance of success will stamp *conviction* on the minds of the public—and thus one or two persons *returning to life* may be

It is reasonable to suppose, that it was not an idle curiosity, that excited such numerous applications for this little well-meant performance; but an equal desire with the writer to save the human race from premature death, and premature interment.

As an undeniable proof, that the *learned* and *humane* approve of the author's intentions, the address in question has been inserted in the *London, Gentleman's, Westminster, and Medical Magazines*; and also in the *Annual Register* for 1777, lately published.

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